

The Celibate Rifles

Nik Rieth, Dave Morris, Damien
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It's the year 2001 and there is a new Celibate Rifles CD to be listened to. The world is an amazing place.

The Rifles have been making some of the most powerful music anywhere since the beginning of the 80s, but the latter half of the 90s appeared to be giving us the signs of a band that was slowing to a halt. 1994 saw the release of the blockbuster *Spaceman In A Satin Suit* CD, but as great as it was, that one stiffed in the marketplace even by indie standards. And since then, the only releases have been various compilations of older material and an acoustic efforts called *On The Quiet*, which though entertaining seemed to be the signal of a band winding down.

So this new disc, *A Mid Stream Of Consciousness*, was an extremely pleasant surprise made more enjoyable by the fact that it's a first rate addition to the Rifles catalog, following firmly in their tradition of rock-em sock-em instrumentation and thought provoking lyrics. I got hooked up with lead singer Damien Lovelock for an interview for a short feature in *The Big Takeover*. The full interview lasted almost an hour and a half and is transcribed in its entirety below.

Noise For Heroes featured the Rifles in a cover story for issue 16, which included a long interview with Kent Steedman. At that time, the band had finished up touring in support of the *Roman Beach Party* lp and was starting work on *Blind Ear*.

It's worth taking a little time to remember each Celibate Rifles album since then, because

sometimes it's easy to let them all run together in one continuous high energy blur. But I always find their records to be like sitting and looking at some great landscape that I've already been to before...stare and gaze for a while and the difference in the lighting or the clouds since the last time I was there bring out new aspects of the view that I hadn't noticed before. With a Rifles disc I'll lay back on the sofa...how appropriate that they named their retrospective CD after that piece of furniture...furious as it is, this music is often best heard lying down on a couch with eyes closed and volume up...and invariably I hear some new lyric phrase I'd missed before or some guitar subtlety that got past me in the full on roar of everything else on previous listens.

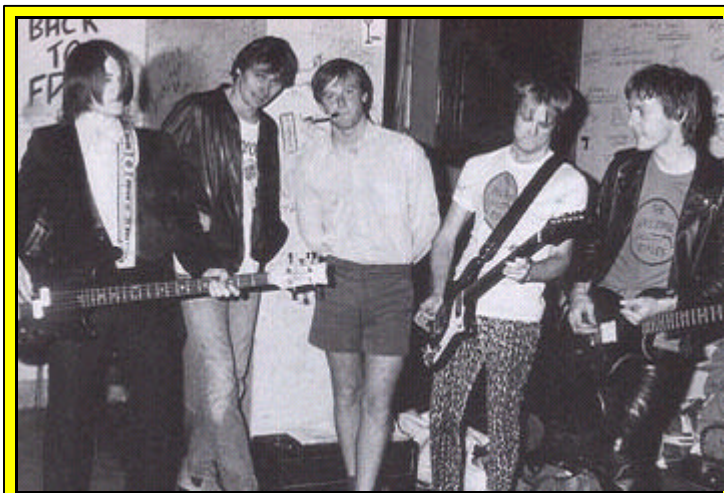
Blind Ear was probably close to the high point of the band's career, that is, if you view such things in terms of public acceptance and prospects for massive revenues. The indie scene worldwide was breaking out of the stranglehold of hardcore punk and UK pop and the garage revival was in full swing. There was a feeling of possibilities again after several years of suffocation. (Does anyone remember what it was to be accused of being *rockist*? Someone who liked rock and roll songs? Tsk, tsk, how gauche!) New fanzines were sprouting up all over to cover groups from corners of the world where no one had expected good music to be found in the past...Scandinavia, continental Europe, and especially Australia. The Celibate Rifles were one of the darling bands of the Australian scene, with lots of press coverage in the US and Europe. Released in 1989, *Blind Ear* was to be their breakthrough record.

And by all rights it should have been. It's a great sounding album with terrific songs. It leads with the potent single "Johnny", about a street tough whose world is going bad, and flows neatly into the pounding "World Keeps Turning", which has a hard, cutting verse guitar bit that then flips to an almost jangly chorus. Third up is the album's showcase cut, "Electrovision Mantra", a song which showcases all the Rifles' best strengths. Opening with a lazy, sitar bit that sounds like the Beatles in 1967, it hits a sudden power surge where the drums come in like a pile driver, powering the song along. Meanwhile one guitar plays the frantic signature riff while the other gradually slides from one chord to the next. Things

beautiful song, and it's followed up immediately by another Ireland song, "Belfast", more of a full on rocker than "Sean O'Farrell", but not as strong as a total package.

Next up, "Cycle" focuses on more personal issues. It also has a slower and more melancholy tune, but one that works really well. "They're Killing Us All" follows...its tempo is plodding, but the words again hold up well. "O Salvation" has a much lighter tune, but the tune basically says it'll get better when you die...not the most optimistic slant on things.

The vinyl lp ends here, but on CD "Salvation" is followed by "El Salvador". The B side of the "Johnny" single, this is a powerhouse of a protest song that may have lost a bit of relevance with the passage of time, but was a searing denunciation in its day with the lines: *They're dying in the streets of El Salvador...from an overdose of America...Send the troops in...It's good for business...All in the name of...Public interest.* And it's one blistering hell raiser of a tune, too. All that could be done to follow this is slow it down, and that's what happens on "Fish and Trees", the album's closer. Even though it's just acoustic guitar for instruments, it's got some typically outrageous Steedman playing to keep it entertaining.



the *Sideroxylon* lineup, 1982-1984 with James Darroch, Damien Lovelock, Phil Jacquet, Kent Steedman, Dave Morris

Why this album stiffed (and in fact, why it gathered so little interest even in the circles that raved about the Rifles for their earlier lps) will remain one of the bigger mysteries of indie music. It's just a great, great record with everything you could want...exciting, slam-bang songs, terrific production, catchy hooks, and brilliantly well thought out lyrics that actually have something to say. But stiff it did, and the features in overseas magazines dried up.

power along like this for two and a half minutes before Damien Lovelock comes in and begins his usual cynical look at the world: *the truth must be entertaining...stop the French Pacific tests...the murder got a lot of press...I liked the mini-series best...although it was kind of depressing...it was good how they all spoke English.* Just a brilliant composition...five and half minutes that always seem to rush by too quickly.

Later in 1990, the band also released the double lp collection *Platters du Jour*, scooping up tracks from their vast back catalog of deleted singles and eps. Most of the Rifles singles after their opening salvo, the ep *But Jacques The Fish*, were viewed by the band as opportunities to stretch and try things outside their normal approach. So this lp turns out to be quite a surprise. There's a fair share of typical rockers, but there are moments like the acoustic guitars of "Eddie" or "Pretty Pictures", Christmas songs like "Summer Holiday Blues" (Christmas is in Australia's summer, remember)

Following this would be hard for any song, so the sequencing wisely goes with a more routine rave up track, "Dial OM". Then it's the remake of *Roman Beach Party's* "Wonderful Life", with more of Lovelock's pointed observations of the hollowness of contemporary lifestyles. This flows into the wistful "Sean O'Farrell", another track that adroitly mixes instrumental textures from muscular crunching guitar sounds to acoustic to viola, while the vocals tell a story of the IRA. It's a searingly

and "Merry Christmas Blues", whacky tunes like "E=MC²", and covers like "I'm Waiting For The Man" and "Dancing Barefoot". Considering how difficult all those early singles are to find, this package was a great treat for many fans who came in late.

But after *Platters* it was quite a wait for an album of new songs. Part of this was due to a change of drummers, as Paul Larsen left to be replaced by Nick Reith. Part of it was also due to changing record labels. So the next record didn't come until 1992 with *Heaven On A Stick*. This was the first Celibate Rifles lp that was released primarily as a CD (although there was a very limited double lp white vinyl copy with a black and white sleeve in Australia). *Heaven* finds the Rifles still with Australian major label backing, this time on Festival. The highlights of this Rob Younger production are without question the blazing "Happy House" and the funky "Groovin' In The Land Of Love", both of which continue the exploration of the shallowness of everyday life. Not far behind are the opening "Light Of Life" and the rocking pop "Electric Flowers". And there's no shortage of topics for Lovelock to skewer, whether it's the way the poor are condemned to their lot on "Compared To What" (not to mention "Cold Wind"), or the state of television on "S'n'MTV", or just musings on the future of the world on "G.G. Absolutely". It ends with a first rate cover of Lou Reed's "Wild Child".

Heaven On A Stick is a solid album but although the individual songs are mostly very good, its parts don't seem to come together to form quite as great a whole as was the case on *Blind Ear*. It didn't create much of a stir in the marketplace either. Grunge was happening in the US and many bands in the Australian indie scene were trying to copy it instead of following their own inventiveness as they'd done in the 80s. Internationally the fanzines and writers who had backed the Rifles heavily up to now found that it was no longer a good bet that an Australian record was going to be something they couldn't get locally, and they stopped featuring Aussie bands across the board, their attention drifting off to other pastures. The Celibate Rifles' momentum was stalling out, even if their creative powers weren't.

To try to halt the slide, the Rifles took stock of their strengths. The unassailable fact was and is that as good as their records were, the stage show was where they shined brightest. So despite the fact that they'd already done one live lp (*Kiss Kiss*

Bang Bang) they decided to make another go of it. The result was 1993's *Yizgarnoff*.

Adding more to the consumer's menu, within just a few months the live lp was followed by a *best of* collection called *Sofa*. The quality of this 20 song collection (with the little foot from the *But Jacques The Fish* ep sneaking across the bottom of the cover) is first rate, but it's an interesting thing to note that when the Brazilian label Tronador issued another Rifles retrospective in 1999 (entitled *Wonderful Life*), they only chose 6 songs that were also on *Sofa*, despite the fact that there was only one album of new material in between the two compilations. The message here is that it's not so easy to pick the best songs by this band. And there's also a lot to be said for hearing Rifles songs in the context of the lp they were originally released on.

But this is jumping ahead...let's talk about *Yizgarnoff* a little first. It's a set of 18 songs, the first 12 recorded at New York's CBGB's (which may have made some people think the album was a reissue of *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, since that was recorded in the same venue a few years earlier), the next 5 at a show in Sydney, and the closer for a JJJ "Live at the Wireless" show. There's a nice preview of "Brickin' Around" to kick things off, an awesomely high energy version of "Happy House", and a powerful take of "Groovin' In The Land Of Love" from the CBGB's show. The Sydney show has a neat surprise with a take of "Tubular Greens"...one of the best tracks from their debut, *Sideroxylon*. The JJJ cut is a scorching version of the old blues classic "Baby Please Don't Go". Overall, *Yizgarnoff* is an impressive testament to the live power of the Celibate Rifles.



the 2nd through 4th lp lineup, 1984-1986 with Damien Lovelock, Kent Steedman, Dave Morris, Phil Jacquet, Michael Couvret

Perhaps it was because so much of the Rifles live presence is due to their visual impact...a maelstrom of furious energy released on audiences that, in the US at least, are totally unprepared for it...but neither of the live lps made the splash that might have been expected. Nice additions to the collection, but for home listening it's the studio lps that really make it, giving the band a chance to stretch out a little, add other instruments, and use the studio. Their next album, 1994's *Spaceman In A Satin Suit*, shows this clearly. The punch of the rockers is better than anything on the live albums, and the slower, moodier pieces work every bit as well. The live albums feel like a collection of wild covers by a first rate punk band, but the studio albums feel like coherent bodies of work where the songs go together to fulfill a bigger purpose. And that's especially true on *Spaceman*. Belying its flippant title, this is one terrific CD.

It kicks off with a song that sounds like a potential hit single in the two minute blast of "Spirits", which features a murderous guitar hook and a killer chorus. Concise and to the point, it hits with the economy of a hammer. With barely a pause for breath, the record then launches into "Kev The Head", whose guitar hook is less radio friendly but equally powerful. Following this is the jolting beat of "Brickin' Around", which debuted on *Yizgarnoff* but is way more powerful here...a really creative production that bears some similarity to "Electravisation Mantra" the way it rolls on for nearly two minutes before the vocals come in, layering all sorts of guitar sounds over a basic, driving riff.

Three songs like this and it's time for a break, which comes with the sinuous and somewhat unsettling "Living What I Dream". But that's just a mood breaker for "City Of Hope", one of the best tracks on the lp. It repeats a three step cycle from a sparse verse to a slightly richer bridge bit and then a knockout chorus piece with no words at all. Lyrically it's a wry observation of a day's goings-on in the city...corrupt businessmen, dope dealers, drunken domestic fights - the usual stuff.

"Coming Apart" has another uniquely Celibate Rifles styled guitar riff...something they do so easily, but nobody else does. Nik Reith's drums overpower this song with a brutally heavy ride on the floor tom. "Big World" and "Whatever You Want" provide an intriguing tempo break, and then it's back to the album's second single candidate in "Kathy Says". Another marvelous guitar hook drives it, but it's the little things like the casual "uh-huh" that Damien tosses into the verse lines that push it over the top. And a terrific outro with a knockout guitar solo that keeps ratcheting up the intensity to close out the song doesn't hurt a bit.

By this time, most listeners will be sold on this album, but if it's not enough the closing four tracks include two more ace rockers in "Cuttin' It Fine" and "Let's Do It Again", plus a strong mid tempo track called "This Gift" that sounds like an ode to enjoying the moment.

Overall, it would be hard to argue with someone who picked this as the best Celibate Rifles album all around. It certainly is loaded with first rate tracks and the production couldn't be sharper. But despite a US release it did nothing to help the band's sliding profile, and it proved to be the band's last release of new material for 6 long



the *Roman Beach Party* lineup with Paul Larsen, Rudy Morabito, Dave Morris, Damien Lovelock and Kent Steedman

years, a period in which many observers figured that the band was done.

1996 saw the release of the Rifle's "unplugged" album, *On The Quiet*. Originally sold only by mail order through Hot Records, this disc sounds like the work of a band struggling to find something that works and can make them connect with an audience. But the Rifles playing acoustic is an unlikely proposition and robs them of their greatest strengths...this is a band that uses quiet songs as an interlude to set the table for the next fistful of raging rockers. Some of the songs work well in this context anyway; "Back On The Corner" feels right, "Electric Flowers" sounds oddly like some 1967 folk rock tune, and "No Sign" also comes across. But a classic like "Jesus On TV" is transformed into a traveling jug band tune and loses a lot of its punch as a result.

There's a treat at the end however, with four electric covers of Australian rock classics that power in the best Rifles tradition. This is a band that can't stay quiet even when that's the whole point of the record. "What Did The Detective Say" smokes and the closing take of the Lipstick Killers classic "Hindu Gods Of Love" is faithful to the original but played faster and with better production. But after waiting two years for a new Rifles disc, this one came as a disappointment, feeling more like a holding pattern or maybe even a retirement party than anything else.

After *On The Quiet* I'd come to accept the idea that the Celibate Rifle were another band that might appear now and then in Australia, but not to the rest of the world, and certainly not on any new recordings. So news of the appearance of a CD full of new songs in *A Mid-Stream Of Consciousness* in the fall of 2000 was welcomed indeed.

Signing to a new indie label and distribution company in Oracle Records, and resorting to the appealing cover motif of a full urine specimen jar, the band hasn't taken significant steps to position themselves on the mainstream racks. Probably none of this matters since at this point in their career, the Rifles are most likely to sell to those who already know them. And those folks won't be disappointed, because this is once again a terrific recording.

How this album came to be and all the difficulties involved in its recording, mixing and ultimate release are all described by Damien in the

interview that follows. For the current purposes, it suffices to talk about the results.

The album begins with "Storm", a song designed to sneak up on you as it starts in a fairly reserved and low key character but then layers on more guitar and a seasoning of keyboards. It's smartly positioned since it's got enough energy to act as a great appetizer but leaves room for another step up in intensity on the next song. "The Paddo Sharps" fills this nicely...a straight ahead ramalama whose interesting lyric content is discussed below.

After this there's not a lot of headroom for more energy, but there is room for a song that has an irresistible hook, and "I Shoulda" is that song. Musically this one is punishing in all aspects, and it's got brilliant production touches like the tambourine that wanders in for the choruses and the detached "ooh-la-la" backing vocals. In an interview Damien did for the great I-94 Bar webzine, he describes his view of how his own son perceives his accomplishments in the Celibate Rifles as "a pretty fucking poor career choice, dad", and this song follows in that kind of thinking...time wasted worrying about what could have and should have been done differently to result in a happier, wealthier and more enviable lifestyle. *Got to re-prioritize...get that corporate style...get the new Ikea catalog...and some really bitchin' tiles...then I'll unleash the power within...and get that winning smile.* After the second chorus there's a simple but overpowering bridge/solo break that seems to up the intensity one more step to where your head is about to be torn right off. The mix of musical power and biting lyrics is irresistible, and "I Shoulda" is simply one of the best songs you'll hear all year.

"G's Gone" provides a break in the intensity but replaces energy with a melodic wistfulness that's sheer beauty. Ringer Chris Abrahams contributes gorgeous piano backing that combines with the Rifles own guitar rock to create the feeling that was present in material by the Visitors, Deniz Tek's post Radio Birdman band that also featured heavy use of piano. "Child Of Mine" drops the aggro level even more...a moody, reflective song with words about Damien's relationship with his own son, now in his late teens.

Clocking in under two minutes, "Wake Up" breaks the trance-like state created by its predecessor with the subtlety of a brick through a shop window. The subsequent track "Hammer" is a little slower but has more room for expression, with an

especially tasty chorus run. After these two, "Dark" feels like listening in on a conversation with someone in a gothic cathedral with monks moaning to a background dirge.

"Me And Slick And Willie" seems to be an extension of the approach used for the *On The Quiet* version of "Jesus On TV"...a shuffling beat of drum sticks on drum rims and acoustic strumming. But "Talk Back Savior" and "Tripping At The Mall" are full on standard Rifles power rock that would've fit in fine on an lp like *The Turgid Miasma Of Existence*.

The CD closes with 3 "bonus" covers that allegedly will disappear on subsequent pressings of the CD (wanna bet?). These are the Stone's "Child Of The Moon", Replacement's "I Will Dare", and the Visitors' "Journey By Sledge". None of these is terribly essential, but the Visitor's song comes off the best of the three.

I personally was so surprised to see a new Rifles CD that I really didn't expect much of this one, and it turns out to be so strong that now I find my interest in the band to be greatly re-energized and I'm hoping that they're going to keep going and making many more CDs after this one. On the worrisome side, recent rumors are that their label Oracle may have gone under, and the resulting loss of any financial payback for their investment in making this record could have chilling effect on their interest in more recording. Hopefully not.

At any rate, the interview below was conducted by phone in January of 2000. It was an easy and interesting 90 minutes...Damien is an engaging and entertaining fellow to talk to, and after a while when he came to realize that I had been a fan for a long time he seemed to enjoy the interview as much as I did. Interviews like this are always the best...just letting the conversation flow where it may, and if part of it involves discussing the merits of Pepperidge Farm cookies, so much the better.

Damien: I'm having a day off which is nice. I don't get many of them, so I'm really enjoying it, and the weather's great.



the *Blind Ear* lineup with Jim Leone, Paul Larsen, Kent Steedman, Dave Morris, and Damien Lovelock

Steve: I heard that you had a hellacious hail storm go through some part of Australia recently.

Damien: Yeah. I heard about that. But it wasn't around Sydney. Around Toomba, yeah. There are a lot of big storms in summer here. All around the country. It's like America that you 4 or 5 different climates and they're all radically different, and every once in a while one bumps into the other and that usually produces some pretty interesting weather.

Steve: I was up in the Blue Mountains around this time of year and there were incredible thunderstorms when I was up there.

D: Yeah, that's a funny place again. It snows there about every three or four winters. So whereabouts are you?

S: I'm in San Diego

D: Oh yeah, I was there once.

S: I saw you guys play here when you were here.

D: Really!? Fuck, there was only about five people there, so I must have met you afterwards.

S: No, you played at UCSD opening for the Dead Milkmen. There were quite a few people.

D: Oh, yeah, I remember that now.

S: Everybody sat on the floor for your show.

D: Yeah, that's the last college gig I ever did in America. I remember that. Not so much that they didn't get into it, although that did piss me off, because there's a lot of things you could not like about the Rifles, but the energy output certainly wouldn't be one of the main criticisms. But I remember I thought the Dead Milkmen were sort of like, not to denigrate them, but I thought this is just like variety show music or something, if you know what I mean? Like some sort of college review rock. And those guys were selling just plane loads full of records and doing incredible business and the fact that we couldn't raise a ripple and those guys were creating a storm, I just thought, well obviously this world and me ain't meant to be together, so I never did another one after that.

S: There's a few of us out here who just don't seem to get what the rest of the people are thinking about, I guess.

D: That's probably a good thing. I wouldn't feel too bad about it. (laughs)

S: I was pretty surprised to see the Celibate Rifles come out with a new CD. I was really happy about that, because I'd thought the Celibate Rifles were probably just about done at this point, and I was wondering how surprised you were to find yourselves doing a new CD.

D: Well, when you saw us that would have been around 1988. No, 1987. Because that was when we had *Roman Beach Party*. That was the last official American tour we ever did. We'd toured America four times at that point, and we were pretty "hot" as far as that there was interest in us. Then a couple of major labels talked to us and offered us contracts that were just outrageous but were apparently industry standard in America. But we thought that the royalties and stuff were just ridiculous. And they required us to be on the road and basically live in America for a couple of years. We just felt...I don't think we even discussed it. Everyone just said "No, we're not prepared to do it."

There's parts of America I really like, and there are parts of the lifestyle in America that I really like if you can afford it. But that was when Reaganomics was really starting to bite into the fabric of American life I think, and we'd seen a lot of that. The homelessness. That's when that problem was just starting to escalate completely out of control.

And my take on America was that there was bad times a-coming if you didn't have a real lot of money, and the thought of just driving endlessly across America doing supports in places like Youngstown, Ohio and things like that...we just thought, fuck it. It's not worth what you get at the end of it, if anything.

So we came home, and also I think we'd decided more or less to concentrate on Europe, where we did well and we just loved touring, even though we never made money there, it was just a really fun place to go. We went to a lot of off the beaten track places, especially in Italy and Switzerland and places like that where rock bands didn't necessarily play little places...they only did giant shows and that was it. We'd met so many interesting people and they were very respectful. They really appreciated it and really got into the fact that you had made the effort to get there, and that was such a contrast to the American system of just go on the road and play these endless one night stands in these shit bars all over middle America to anything from 5 to 80 people and do ten or twelve hour drives between each one. I think we were prepared to do the work but we really couldn't see doing another two years of it exclusively, just living in America and doing that. The two labels we spoken to both talked a lot about how if you put out a record here you just basically gotta hit the road and do any gig that you can get.

S: And your chances of ever breaking here with the style of music you play is just about zero anyway.

D: I remember saying to one guy, look, I'm not a fool mate, and I know we're playing a kind of music that even when it was popular wasn't very popular, and that was ten years ago. (laughs) I can't really see us being the next Brittany Spears.

So we came home to sort of concentrate on Australia. Because we'd never been really very highly thought of in this country until we went overseas. And as has always been the case...we got a terrific review in the Village Voice that called us "the band of the year", I think it was, in 1986, and when we came home with press like that, suddenly we could make very good money in our own country playing to people here. That was really fun, you know? It's great to be appreciated in your own back yard. I think that's best of all, to know that you're connecting with the people that you live with and grew up. That worked for us, you

know? Since then we've made five studio albums. Are you aware of that?

S: Oh, yeah, I have everything you guys have ever done.

D: Great! So then you'd know that last rock album was *Spaceman In A Satin Suit*, which I think was about 1995 (*actually 1994 – ed*).

S: A terrific CD, too.

D: Yeah, I thought in many ways that that might be the best CD we ever made, and it was the worst selling record we ever made. A total disaster. But I love the sound of it, and I think it's got a lot of classic Rifles. We tried a lot of different things, too, most of which I thought worked. But that's the nature of things.

And then we did the acoustic album (*On The Quiet*). I know a lot of older Rifles fans say that of all the stuff they've got, that's the one of ours they play the most.

S: I like that one a lot too, but I like the rocking stuff the best. I'd say *Blind Ear* is close to my favorite.

D: Well that was the record we made by not going back to America. After *Roman Beach Party* we came home, we did a European tour in 1988, and then we got signed by a major label here...well, it was a small label, but it was funded by EMI. A label called True Tone. And they put us in the best studio in Australia, with a budget that gave us four weeks to make a record instead of four days. And we had made enough money from playing live that we could afford to take three or four months off and live and write and rehearse. That's why that record sounds like it sounds. There's no secret formula to it. We were in the position for the first time in our lives of being full time musicians. Yeah, that's a great record.

You should know that every Boxing Day, which is the day after Christmas, we work through our back catalog. We always do a gig on Boxing Day and we play one record in its entirety, plus we do whatever covers we were playing at that time that we no longer play. And next Christmas is *Blind Ear*. If you're planning a trip to Australia, you should maybe plan to be here for Christmas.

S: That's a good motivation! But back to the original question about the new CD...

D: Was I surprised? Not surprised...this album, *A Mid Stream Of Consciousness*, I suppose the surprise element was that we managed to do it at all. Because we fell out with our old label and our management about four years ago, and we sort of managed to produce the acoustic album after things had already deteriorated fairly badly there, and we put that out on Hot.

Then we basically went into a kind of free fall. Like my son just finished high school. One of the other guys has a full time job for five years that's a real big deal...you know, he's a three piece suit and makes a lot of money. So you know, life kind of moved in on us again. It just was getting harder and harder to pull things together, just to play or rehearse or do anything. Other people have got kids and marriages and things. That's the hardest part of staying around for twenty years is to try to keep some common ground where you can find the time to get together and do stuff.

We elected to make this record for no other reason than I think to justify that we hadn't broken up. It was a great plan. We went into a big studio and recorded all the rhythm tracks in four days. And then basically the entire thing just fell apart. The original guy who was meant to engineer and produce it blew out two sessions in a row. We were doing it on down time, so if we blew out a session, we might not get another weekend when the studio wasn't busy for another three months. So instead of taking three to four months to make the record, it took two and a half fucking years!

And other than that four days when we cut the rhythm tracks, I spent most of it in a little tiny studio by myself...I was working a full time job, my son was in his last year of high school – I'm a single parent – so it was just fucking nuts. They'd ring me up and say OK, we've got some time this Saturday, and I'd think, oh, that's right...I'd have completely forgotten we were even trying to make a record. And then I'd have to go back and get the cassette tape of the last session and see "oh that's right, I was going to work on this song", and then listen to the piece of music, because there were no lyrics written for this album. Then I'd write a set of lyrics for one piece of music, go in and record it, and that was it. Then I wouldn't be back there for anything from six weeks to another three months.

And mixing it was even worse. The same thing happened. We lined a guy up to do it, booked a week of time, took a week off work, and he just didn't show up. So we spent nearly all our money

on nothing and then had to mix the whole album in about three days.

It was just amazing, it was really the trials of Job. Everything that could have gone wrong did go wrong. And as a result, none of us had any picture in our mind or in our heart of what this record was as a piece of work. It was so fragmented and we were so distanced from it. I remember we got together, about four of us in the studio one day doing the harmonies, and we were looking at each other and I said "I don't know, maybe we've just made the worst record in history." And nobody said, "Oh, bullshit!" - they just went, "yeah, maybe".

Everyone was saying, well we'll at least get a four track ep out of it, maybe we'll have to use a few covers, but I'm sure that there's at least four good songs on this record. That's the kind of vibe we had for the thing. And then one night when I had just about finished doing all the lead vocals...I think I had about nine tracks completed and two of the covers done...I was in the studio and I said to the guy "look, can you please just dub off one copy of everything we've done onto a cassette so I can just listen to it as a body of work and see what the fuck is there?" I did it so that I could see if there were tracks that were so obviously bad that there was no point in wasting time writing lyrics for them. So I did that and I drove home. And to drive from the studio, which is in King's Cross, to where I live, which is Newport Beach, is a 45 minute drive, and the album runs about 42 minutes without the covers on it. And by the time I got home...and this sounds really sort of melodramatic...I kind of had like tears in my eyes. It was just utter surprise - I thought, this is a fucking really good record! I couldn't believe how well the body of work held together. I didn't hear anything and go "well, there's a hit single", or "there's an obvious classic song", but the sum of the parts - I was so unprepared to like it or be impressed by it - and I know that can probably sound really egotistical and all that, but that's the truth of it. But when I got home about one in the morning I rang two of the guys up and got them out of bed and I said "Look, you're not going to fuckin' believe this, but I think we've made a good record. I've just listened to it." Because nobody had heard it like that, as a piece of work with all of the tracks lined up one after the other.

So that's the story of the record...did I answer the question?

S: Absolutely. I think you're right that it really did come out well. And from my own experiences I know how hard it is to do something when the time is all broken up.

D: That's right. We've always been the opposite where one of the main criticisms people always had of our records is that we didn't spend enough time making them. There wasn't enough polish. And from a certain perspective that's true. Because except for once, we were never in the position to do it. So we'd rehearse and then basically go in and in ten days record and mix the whole thing. So you had an incredibly clear view of the record as a coherent piece of work. This one was like finding a bunch of postcards that they sent to your old address, except that you don't live there, and trying to make some sort of narrative out of it. So it was a delightful surprise to find out that we could.

S: I wanted to ask you about some of the specific songs. The song that hit me right away was "I Shoulda", and I looked on the Celibate Rifles website after I'd been listening to the CD for a month or so, and I see there's kind of a big push to get that song a lot of radio play in Sydney.

D: Well, I'm so out of touch with the way that the record industry works these days - which is in many ways not a bad thing - but when I took the CD into Triple J, which is the main radio station here - and it's national - and they said "Are you gonna have a single?" And I said, "Well we can't really justify the expense of lifting two or three tracks". And then the guy said, well, the other thing you do is called a "focus track". And I said, "Oh, well the focus track should be 'I Shoulda'", because it's quintessentially the Celibate Rifles. It's what we're famous for. You could put it on any Rifles album after 1985 and it would fit perfectly. And it's 3 minutes long and meets all the criteria of something radio would play. And it's been very well received. First people like it because it's a good rock song. Then they like it because it's got funny lyrics. And then they like it after that because it's also in some ways profound. It's thought provoking, or at least people seem to find it thought provoking.

A fellow actually stopped me at the traffic light the other day that I don't know and said "Mate, you've written the soundtrack to my life" (laughs). I think that's a real complement.

S: Yeah, well I have to say that when I hear songs like this I always feel a little twinge of guilt in the back of my head, like "Is he talking about me?"

D: I'm talking about everybody. Me especially. I don't think there's anyone over the age of 14 who doesn't experience this. The song was originally called "4 AM" for obvious reasons. But then seeing as I'd used that repetition I thought it would be stupid to call it anything but "I Shoulda". But I don't think there's anyone past the age of 14 that doesn't experience that sort of totally pointless soul searching. Sometimes it's good...it's good to think about your life. But to lie awake at three or four in the morning thinking "oh, I shoulda done this" and trying to locate the source of the problem...for me, anyway, that has never been productive. It's never yielded much...except a good lyric.

S: I read the interview you did with Craig Regan on the I-94 Bar website and you were talking about the song "The Paddo Sharps". If I hadn't read that, I'd have had no idea what this song was about.

D: Well, that's the same in Australia. If you're under 30 years of age...well, probably 35...if you're under 35 you would have no idea what the Paddo Sharps were. But you've been to Sydney, right? You've been to Paddington? Well, that's Paddo. Paddington was a very tough working class suburbs. It was one of the worst suburbs in Sydney. It was like the Bowery. Right from the turn of the century until the late 60s, when we got free university tuition for the first time in this country. And all the kids...I guess the Vietnam war generation...all those kids went and became students, and people thought "that's what I want to do". And it was full of these great big old terraced houses, like areas in San Francisco. So six people could live in a house and you were only paying 30 dollars a week for the whole house. So you could live on nothing.

So all these guys moved in there, and it was one of the hippy centers, if not THE hippy center. Like our version of Haight Ashbury in the late 60s. And as a lot of these guys finished their degree and started making serious money, they liked where they were living and so they bought the house they lived in for next to nothing.

Then they thought, hey this is good, so they bought the one next to it and then the one next to that, and blah-de-blah-de-blah and then when the gay sort of culture and the gay rights movement really got going, for some reason it took root in

Paddington. So Paddington is now one of the most expensive and exclusive suburbs in Australia. But the Paddo Sharps that I'm writing about were essentially just like other gangs, but they come from the late 60s, and they're probably the only genuine Australian youth culture that was ever developed here and that we didn't borrow from somewhere else. It wasn't a version of an American or and English thing.

The gangs were called Sharpie gangs because they looked sharp and had short hair when everyone else had long hair. Probably they would be closest to the Wise Guys in *Mean Streets* for example. Closer to that, but without all that mafia and Italian-Catholic culture. They just dressed sharp, were mostly working class, and they were absolutely fucking lethal. Anybody who was a teenager in those days that had to go out on a Friday or Saturday night to go to a hippy dance or something to see a band or see music, you took your life in your hands. Because if you ran into those guys, they were fucking relentless. And they weren't like skinheads or neo-Nazis who pick on blacks or Jews. They hated everybody equally. They just attacked anything and anyone that came across their path.

So that was why I wrote that song. That was such a part of my growing up. I thought, well, it's kind of sad that those things come and go and are just forgotten, you know, they don't exist in our culture anymore. Not that Sharpies don't exist, but they're not part of the social history of the place. And also because I thought the lyric really suited the energy of that piece of music. Such an aggressive kind of riff, if you know what I mean? And there's not that many things I can think of that I feel that way about. But I remember them only too well...they put me in the hospital about three times.

S: Really? Can you tell the story there in more detail?

D: Oh, I just ran into them at a dance one night when I was 14. There was about 8 of these guys, probably in their early 20s. And I walked out and I had long hair and I had an earring, and that was fucking it! I must have been kicked and punched about 400 times in 60 seconds, and I had a fractured skull and broken ribs and a broken nose and a busted arm and had my balls kicked through the top of my head.

And the funny thing was, there was a security guard with a gun standing on the door as I walked

out of the dance, and when he saw it, he ran inside and locked himself in. That's how scared people were of Sharpie gangs.

S: Another one I want to ask you about is "Talk Back Savior". I understand that this one's about a talk show scandal...can you tell me more about that?

D: It's about an advertorial, where people pay these guys big money to promote their product ahead of other products, but it's not an advertising thing. Someone rings in about a telephone problem and they say "Well actually I use Optus and blah blah blah that's been working really well for me, maybe you should try that." It's an advertisement that doesn't appear to be an advertisement and it breaches the code of ethics about broadcasting in this country. So it was a big scandal and the two biggest names in talk back radio here got burned severely and embarrassed enormously. And they actually had to release the amounts of money...I mean this is probably not that big a deal in America because that sort of shit happens all the time, but for people that big to be caught out here and have their bank accounts printed in the newspapers where you could actually read how much money these guys were getting paid for their supposed unbiased opinions, it was a big deal.

S: Can you tell me more about "G's Gone"? I really liked the music on that. When I heard that I thought, wow, this sounds like a Visitors' song.

D: Yeah, I suppose, because it's keyboard dominated. Hmm. Well Kent wrote the piece of music. And I don't write poppy sort of stuff that often, and we certainly don't write stuff that has that sort of beautiful, melancholy edge to it. In a way I find it a very evocative bit of music. I heard it at rehearsal, I drove home, I stopped at the beach next to the beach that I live in to get a pizza, and in the time it took to get the pizza, I wrote the whole lyric. It just really inspired me.

Then when we recorded it, I got Chris Abrahams, who is probably the finest jazz pianist in the country to play on it. He played on my solo albums and he's done a few things in the past. And Kent hated the keyboards, and that song almost didn't make it onto the record at all. We wound up doing a bit of a trade off, because there was another song...I can't even remember which one it was...that I didn't want on the record and he really wanted it, so we swapped.

The lyric was about somebody I knew that died of a drug overdose, and there was a great debate over whether it was suicide or an accident. This was a person who'd been a heroin addict for years and then got clean and stayed clean for about eight years and got married and had a family. Then the marriage fell apart and then she just struggled and started using again. It was really a very sad story. You always had that weird mixture where sometimes you'd think of that person and you'd really miss them and other times you'd think about what happened and you'd get really angry. There are so many different responses to that situation. And that piece of music allowed a kind of soundscape where you could talk about those different unreconciled feelings, and it fit in the music really well to me.

S: Well, I think the keyboard was a good move and it fits in really well, so I'm glad that you worked it out with Kent to get this one on the CD. It's a good change of pace.

D: Precisely...It's just nice to have some variety on a CD. The Ramones made great records, but you don't want every record to sound like the Ramones.

S: What's the story with all the heroin in Australia anyway? There are so many deaths by overdose in the music community there.

D: It's been here since the Vietnam war. When the American troops were in Vietnam, they used to come to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne for what they called R&R...rest and recreation. Three weeks leave. And up to that point, there was a kind of a drug thing here, but it was mostly marijuana and pills... amphetamines. That was it. This was the mid 60s. We were a long way behind. This was a very innocent and backward country.

But when the service men started coming down, of course, there was a huge heroin problem up there. And these guys, when they came to Australia, because they were military personnel, they didn't go through customs. They went through military customs when they LEFT Australia. So they could come down with whatever amount of dope they wanted and when they were going, whatever they hadn't used, they'd either give away to the prostitutes that were hanging out with them, or they'd sell it for no money. And this was really pure shit.

So the heroin problem in this country went from a really tiny thing with just a few people in the jazz scene and in Chinatown to an enormous problem that no one was equipped to deal with. And really it's never gone away. It's a bit like America, sometimes heroin is more popular than other times, but it's always there. And now we've had a lot of migration from Vietnam and there's a lot of cheap dope there. So in the Vietnamese communities there are certain gangs that get very high quality heroin and it's very cheap. Heroin is the cheapest it's ever been.

S: There's so many guys in bands that I've really liked over there that have either died or had major problems from heroin, and it's scary. It may be different here in San Diego from New York or something, but we don't see heroin around here. Guys on crack and crystal meth, but the heroin use seems frightening.

D: For me...I've abstained from all drugs and alcohol for 18 years, but to me, because there's not a lot of crack and stuff here, crack seems to me to be more frightening than heroin. So that's interesting.

S: I guess it's because I've talked to or interviewed some of the guys who've died from heroin, and I don't know people who've died from crack.

D: Absolutely it's a problem here. Absolutely. But it's not one that you or I are going to solve I suspect.

S: Changing topics here, I've heard that you were hosting a TV show in Sydney for a while. Can you talk about that?

D: Yeah, I was part of a thing called The Late Report, which was a completely unplanned, unscripted and fairly unpopular half hour sort of comedy show. But it was on commercial TV, that was the big thing. This wasn't on public broadcasting, this was on channel 7, which is like CBS or something, on a Monday night about two years ago. It ran 11 episodes and they canceled it. But some of it was good. I used to handle the celebrity interviews, and I got to interview Keanu Reeves and Isaac Hayes the last two shows. That was really funny, he (Reeves) was out here to promote The Matrix. It was a really big deal, and in the middle of it I got to do this interview him. And it turns out that he's a big Celibate Rifles fan, which was amazing!

S: That would blow me away!

D: Yeah, and then I did Isaac Hayes the next week. That was great too, that was funny as hell. I got him straight off the plane, so he was just cross eyed with jet lag.

S: I suspect he was not a Celibate Rifles fan.

D: No, but I pretended that he was and I presented him with our complete back catalog and a T shirt and he was laughing his head off. He thought it was funny as hell.

S: So how did you get that gig?

D: Well, I do sports and sports sort of sociology and pop psychology...all sorts of different things...on talk back radio with different people at different times, and someone had heard me somewhere doing that. I was actually doing a piece when they were going to bring Baywatch out here. It was really good because they were going to be headquartered at the beach that's the next beach up from where I live. The council was thinking like: this is really great, there's going to be all this money and Pamela Anderson's tits, and we're all going to get to be on TV, and all the locals said "Aw, get fucked!" when they heard about it. And they sent them packing. And Baywatch couldn't find a beach in Australia that wanted them. It was pretty funny to have the most popular TV show in the world and everyone in Australia telling them "yeah, yeah, that's great, but don't do it here. Go somewhere else. Go next door. Go up the road. Just not here."

So I did a piece on that, and this guy heard me, and the next thing two days later I was on TV.

S: Pretty good!

D: Yeah, I don't say no to a lot of things at first. Even though I had serious misgivings about how much of a talent I was going to be on television. I thought, what the fuck. I've never done it, and I'm probably not going to get asked again, so let's go! It was fun, it was nerve wracking because it was all live. It's terrifying. Especially when you're working with people who do comedy and have been doing it for ten years or twenty years, and you've been doing it for one day.

S: Well, you've got kind of a good dry sense of humor that comes out in your lyrics, anyway.

D: Well, thank you.

S: I got that *Wonderful Life* CD from the Brazillian label Tronador, and I was wondering how you got that deal, and what's the story with Ronnie Biggs (the "great train robber" who sang on the Pistols "No One Is Innocent" single after Johnny Rotten left and now resides in exile in Brazil) being on it, and why are their two different versions of it?

D: I have no idea. I really don't know. The guy who runs it is an ex-patriot Australian. And he came out here some years ago, and he's a big Rifles fan and he said, "Look, I think the Rifles could be big in Brazil." And we went "Oh yeah, great!". And he said "I want to put a compilation out, and I'm gonna give you..." you know, ten bucks or whatever, and we said, "Yeah, OK, whatever!" And what we didn't know, well I didn't know, was that he was going to do all the artwork and everything. But I just said "ah, what the hell". I guess the Ronnie Biggs thing made sense in Brazil. It's a bit like France and Italy. They have their own culture and humor and a lot of stuff that they think is a really great idea, you look at it and think WHAT the FUCK?! But it makes sense there. Maybe that was a real smart thing to do, I don't know. I was really surprised! (laughs)

S: So has he actually sold many of those?

D: I have no idea. Don't know. I should take a more active interest, but it's usually depressing so I don't (laughs). It's a good sounding record I think. In terms of compilations it's a beauty. It was obviously a labor of love to him. It's hard to get...you know, it's easy to find fault but why would you? It's a great compliment that someone would take that much interest in your career after all those years I think.

S: You mentioned how you'd fallen out with Hot Records, and I know often this kind of stuff is a little sensitive to discuss, but I was hoping you could explain a little of what happened there.

D: I think it's pretty simple. Hot began as a label in order to put out the first Rifles album. So our history goes back a long way. We were all good friends and they were our label for a while. And as the industry changed in the late 80s and the indies really were getting swamped, and everybody was going on majors and Madonna and U2 and all that were being called "indie bands", so the whole point of being indie sort of disappeared.

Then they sort of folded the label for a while and they became our management. We had a very complicated and I think largely pretty productive time. I'd call it an adventure more than a career. We worked together in different capacities. The relationship changed a lot over the period from say 1983 to about 1995. But eventually I think Hot had just reached a point where they were going one way and we were going another way, and we had very great needs career wise that they just weren't in a position to meet. And also at that time, we weren't generating enough money. Whereas other areas of Hot were generating money, so those are the areas they pursued. Because they were still a cottage industry, and that's the harsh reality.

But I think it was sort of complicated by the fact that we all became quite good friends. It was very much a shared journey. Eventually, after the acoustic album, everyone just went, look we want to make another record, but we don't want to make it on Hot. And Hot didn't particularly want us to make another record for them and certainly weren't in a position to pay for it, or probably had very little interest in paying for another record. I think it was one of those things just like a marriage where it had just run its course. It had reached its obvious conclusion and it was time to move on. That's it. There's really no acrimony. Individuals have bad words to say about other individuals, but as a sort of spokesperson for the Celibate Rifles I would say that certainly anything Hot did that disadvantaged us over the years was more than outweighed by the things they did that advantaged us, and I don't think that any of that was ever deliberate or acrimonious or anything like that. I think it was just one of those things. As you said at the start of this interview, we were trying to sell a kind of music that never sold very well in its heyday, and they stuck in for 12 years. And you've gotta give them credit for that.

S: Well, that seems like a pretty fair minded summary. It does seem like Hot is pretty focused on Ed Kuepper and all the releases he's pumped out.

D: Yeah, and they do a huge business in England with Eva Cassidy, who's a female singer that died. They released some song after she'd died and it went ballistic in England. It sold 100,000 copies! And that's a pretty good client to have, you know (laughs) because you don't have to pay royalties, I guess. They do a lot of things. They're fine. We sat down and had a really big business meeting with them about two months ago, and it started of

as a screaming match and finger pointing and “you said this, and...”. You know?

What do you think of *A Mid Stream Of Consciousness*?

S: (Who's interviewing who here?) I really like it. I think it's a great CD...it's a grower.

D: That's what everyone says. First listen you say “oh, well yeah”, but it's interesting enough that you play it again and then it starts to really get into you.

S: It seems like every few times I play it some other song becomes the one I'm really paying attention to, and that's always a good sign.

D: That's great...that more reminds me of the late 60s and early 70s when people started making albums as albums rather than collections of hit singles. Those were good times because listening to a record...you had to listen to it 40 or 50 times before you really knew all about it. That was good.

S: I've always liked that about a band like Died Pretty. There hasn't been a Died Pretty record yet that I've liked the first time. Every single time I get it and I go “Oh, shit, they've totally screwed up this time and they've lost it completely”, but they have a good track record so I keep playing their stuff and after I've played it ten times it starts to make sense.

D: Well, only if there was more of you in the world, I think we'd sell a lot more records.

S: It's tough today because there's so damn many CDs out there and it's hard to give them the time they might deserve.

D: That's right. Dave from the Rifles was saying the one category in contemporary music that should be created is “difficult listening”. They've got “easy listening”. Captain Beefheart would fit in there, and I think the Celibate Rifles. The Celibate Rifles is demanding listening, maybe. It's not difficult.

S: A lot of those kinds of records turn out to be the best ones there are.

D: Well, they're the ones you go back to. It's true. Quite often I hear new things today...one good example, is it Papa Roach, is that what they call the Californian band? I heard this one track once...it's pretty amazing: (imitates singer) “cut my

life into little pieces / this is my last resort”. I heard it once and I thought “Wow, that's pretty fucking intense!” It's not a style of music I'm particularly interested in, but I thought wow! But within a week I'd heard that one track like 38 times because this one radio station jumped all over it. I was just fucking sick of it, just hated it. But that tends to be what they do these days, pick one track and then flog it to death.

My son's 18, and often he'll come home with a record that's meant to be a really big deal, and I'll listen to it, and just because you've got a trained ear, the song that's being played on the radio, like if the budget for the album was two hundred grand, the song they play on the radio they spent 160 on, and the rest of the album 20, and they took the last 20 and everyone bought a new guitar. And you can hear it. And that really pisses me off. I don't like that; it's very cynical.

S: Are you a big fan of a lot of older music? Have you been a big fan of rock and roll in general throughout your life?

D: I was talking to my father the other day...I didn't grow up with my dad. My dad was in New York from when I was 2 to when I was 18. And I was here with my mum. And he said: “What's the first song you can remember walking around the house singing?” And I said, well, it was “76 Trombones”. Because I found a copy of it in a garbage can when I was about 4. That was the first record I ever owned and it was scratched to buggery, but I loved it because it was my record. And then I remember being completely fascinated by Little Richard. When I was about 4 or 5 years old I would hear it on my uncles' car radio. We didn't have a car, but when I went to my uncle's house, he'd drive us to the beach. He had a great big convertible, and I would sit in the back seat. It was such a funny old car, and I was so little, that I couldn't see over the side, so I used to just lie back and watch the sky go past. And he had a car radio, and they used to tune it to the young adult station because my cousin was about 15 or 14, and she was A TEENAGER. This would be like 1960, 61 or 62. They used to play Little Richard a lot and Jerry Lee Lewis as well as the more contemporary stuff at that time, which would have been Frankie Avalon, Bobby Rydell... those were my earliest musical memories.

I still listen to Little Richard, and I still think it's probably the most exciting music I ever heard...just the sheer energy content. The Rifles actually

covered a Little Richard song briefly, but because we didn't have a piano and I'm not Little Richard, it didn't sound very good and we dropped it. We used to do "Rip It Up".

That was why I liked Patti Smith when I first heard her. She gestured to all that sort of music. She said, "Hey, that's not something to be embarrassed about. That's not some sort of embryonic form of rock and now this is all really interesting. That was great then and this is great now." And I liked that. I like to think about music like that, because I hadn't up to that point. I was a little bit embarrassed to say that I still found a lot of those records a lot more interesting than the contemporary stuff in the mid 70s. I think that was one of the great things Patti Smith did for me, was to liberate that stuff.

S: What about Australian bands like the Easybeats and the Masters Apprentices?

D: Oh, yeah! We recorded an Easybeats song on the acoustic album. We put four electric covers on the end of that album, and they were all Australian bands from the 60s and 70s. And we've got a Visitors cover on this album. So yeah, there's a lot of great Australian music I like. Even some do-wop stuff, which was pretty poxy compared to Dion Denucci, but I still liked it because it was part of my childhood. I used to watch these guys on TV and everything just looked so amazing. Everything was so new and amazing, to see these things on television in 1964 and 65 when you were a little kid.

S: In the I-94 Bar interview you were looking back fondly on your time in the 80s...

D: Well that was definitely the boom time.

S: What was that like for you as a band?

D: Fantastic! Well, the first half of the 80s, I used to say it took us five years to become an unknown band. We had such a low profile that I think terrorist organizations could have studied us to see how to be invisible, because we certainly had seemed to master it.

The big break that we got in terms of profile was an American, David Fricke, who was the editor of *Rolling Stone* at one time I think, but at that time was writing for *Musician* magazine. Are you familiar with him? Well David Fricke came out in 1983, or maybe it was 1982, to do a thing on music

from down under. It was the Saints, Radio Birdman, Midnight Oil, INXS and I think Hunters and Collectors where there was interest. And the Birthday Party. And he came down, and while he was here, someone said, "You should see this band, the Celibate Rifles". And they gave him the first album, and it blew him away. He loved it. So we weren't scheduled to do any gigs, and one of the people who was with him said, "Can you get a gig?" And we said, "Mate, we couldn't get a gig if we took hostages! But he can come to a rehearsal." And he came! Came to a rehearsal and he wrote this huge article in *Musician*. And there we were...a color picture of the fucking Celibate Rifles and a story about how good we were. (*editor's note*: Fricke reprised this review and repeats the story in the liner notes to the *Sofa* CD on Hot.)

S: You know, I think I have that one. Is that the one with the singer from Midnight Oil on the cover?

D: That's it, that's the one, baby. Well that's the first decent review we ever got. That's it. And then 1986 we went overseas to America and a little bit to Europe, and we recorded *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* at CBGB's. So the 80s for us, as it was beginning to decline for a lot of people, that's when it was taking off for us, and Christ, we got to see the fucking world. So maybe we didn't make any money, but Jesus! For a bunch of guys who, well, I was just pleased if 20 people showed up to see us play, and then there we were playing at CBGB's, and playing in Boston and playing in California and playing at the I Beam. Meeting up with Jello Biafra and saying "Hey, you're not in my country, we've come over to yours".

That was such a great time for me, I'm still grateful. I don't tend to look back and get all bitter and think well, fuck, we didn't make any money and we could've been as big as Nirvana or any of that shit. I just look back and think, Christ, I'm glad I did it. And I'm glad I'm still doing it and I still like it! I still really enjoy it.

S: What's your view of the other bands from that time? I feel like the scene in Australia at that time was as good a scene as there has been anywhere at any time.

D: That's exactly what I think, and when you tell people in this country that, they don't believe you. But I remember coming back and saying, listen. In 1986 in New York, there were like 6 clubs that have rock and roll. And that's it! And there's 14

million people living there...that's the whole population of this fucking country! And there's SIX clubs that have rock and roll! Here, every single pub, every single little bar in Sydney had bands on 3 or 4 nights a week. It was just amazing.

S: I was there in 1987 and was there for 2 weeks, and every night you had to make a tough decision about who to see, because it meant you were going to miss someone else you also wanted to see badly.

D: That really is what it was like. You try to tell people about what that was like now, and either they don't believe you or they think that you're exaggerating so that you can put shit on their culture. My son's 18, and I used to say to him, that just the "what's on" guide in the daily paper 15 years ago, there'd be like 9 pages of listings. Now it fits on half a page.

S: I have a poster that I tore off the wall in Sydney in 1987 for a Rifles tour called "Draw My Arse And Win A Buick". Where did that name come from?

D: That's right – draw my arse and win a Buick. Yeah, yeah! That was the big tour! When we came back, we'd been overseas for ten months. You know where that quote comes from? Lenny Bruce. He was my all time hero...my great idol. Even more than any of the bands, I just loved Lenny Bruce. And he used to do a piece called "Tits and Ass". He's talking about Las Vegas...it's fairly dated now, but it's a great piece. You should listen to it if you can find it. And at the end of it he goes: "The most American tits and ass in the world. Grandma Moses' tits and Norman Rockwell's ass. Draw my ass and win a Buick!" (laughs)

S: Well, I'm very glad to have this explained, because I've had that poster for 13 years now, and all that time I've been going "what in the HELL were those guys thinking of?"

D: Well that's what it was. (laughs again)

S: This whole thing of naming tours is foreign to the US at any rate...did you have any other memorable ones?

D: Well, we used to have a thing called "The Rorty Dog Cooperative". It was run by the Celibate Rifles, but there were 5 bands in it...Died Pretty, the Wet Taxis, the Mushroom Planet and the Playful Kittens, who were like a noise band, and

the Celibate Rifles. And we did a tour called Rorty Goes To Collingwood, which is a suburb of Melbourne of no particular interest to anybody, except people who live there, but that was based on Frankie Goes To Hollywood and so that was very funny at the time. People thought that was hysterical.

The tour we just did was called "A Mid Summer Night Stream". A Shakespearean thing, substituting the word "stream" for "dream" (to tie into the new CD title).

But yeah, we always would try to come up with tour names. I don't know where that came from, actually. It was just something funny to put on a poster. I should look, because I've got a lot of T shirts and posters that I kept...I don't know what for; I've still got them in plastic bags, particularly from the late 80s and early 90s. I suppose it's because we toured so much in those days that to delineate the end of one tour and the beginning of another tour where you might be playing different music or whatever, the tour would have a different name and a different poster. Maybe that's where it came from. But it was fun...it was more fun naming tours than naming albums. That's really hard to do.

S: Are you pretty good friends with the guys from Died Pretty?

D: Well, I don't see them any more. I bumped into them just before Christmas in the rehearsal room. They've just put out a new album. But I was, yeah, I was very good friends with Brett Myers.

S: I find it amazing that Died Pretty and the Rifles, and the New Christs, too, are going to come with a new album this year

D: Well, the New Christs are still going, but they've broken up and reformed with different personnel but the same name about six times. Died Pretty and the Rifles certainly never have finished in that there's never been a formal announcement. We've kept going. Died Pretty have been going for I guess about 18 years, and the Rifles for 21.

S: Nick and Jim have been in the band for most of the 90s, right?

D: Yeah, Jim joined in 1988 and Nick joined in 1990 or 1991.

S: It seems like those two guys made the Rifles take a step in how tight sounding everything was. I really like Nik as a drummer.

D: Nik is a great drummer. Not enough people realize it. I think it's a little bit like Charlie Watts. So many people loved the Stones for years, but it wasn't until Keith Richards starting saying "the whole thing is Charlie Watts. You replace him, and the whole vibe that is the Rolling Stones from their best period is lost." And Nik Reith I think is that good a drummer.

S: He's so hard hitting and steady sounding.

D: But he's got great feel.

S: How about Jim...what's his background?

D: He played in a band called No Man's Land, and then he joined us. I don't think Jim was a very powerful bass player when he joined us, because the guy we had before that, Michael Couvret, is like probably the most powerful bass player I've very played with. He plays like a sledgehammer. But Jim is very musically sophisticated. He's got a great ear and he brought a lot of very good ideas on harmony. He's a very tasteful and inventive bass player. He's a good harmony singer and he's got a good ear for arranging. He's a very talented musician. So he brought a lot to the Rifles that wasn't there before. A lot of polish and finesse that I think you can really hear on the subsequent records.

S: What's Dave Morris like? You never read anything about him... in all the things I ever read about the Rifles it's mostly you and Kent handling the interviews and Dave seems to stay in the background.

D: Yeah, that's Dave. I reckon Dave's the best sort of chainsaw rhythm guitarist I've ever seen, and he's a huge part of the Rifles sound. But he doesn't write much stuff and doesn't like to do interviews. He's done a few radio ones with me. He's got a good sense of humor. He's very funny. But that's about it. He's got a very diverse range of musical taste. We share a great love of Little Richard. Other than the fact that we're in the band together that's our other great thing. And he makes a fantastic cup of coffee. The best espresso you've ever had.

S: And what's Kent doing when he's not playing in the Rifles?

D: Well, he's got a band in Italy called Yage.

S: Is he still doing that?

D: I think so. And he spends a lot of time in Oregon. He's into that kind of new age religious thing.

S: Is there anything else you'd like to have said that I haven't asked you about?

D: Well, it's always difficult to think of a question you'd like to be asked. Just to anybody in America who still remembers us, it would be nice if they get to hear this record, because we still have very fond memories of playing in America, too, that aren't all about Youngstown, Ohio. I remember California particularly and the East Coast. For some reason we always seemed to do better on the east coast, which nobody thought would happen. People said we'd do great in California, and we didn't really. But Boston, New York, New Jersey and Washington we did really well in. I'd like to play there again sometime. I don't know if it will ever happen, but it would be good.

S: Those cities have more broadminded scenes I think. San Francisco can be good. Los Angeles, at the time that you were coming over was still recovering from hardcore. It was almost the only independent music there was in Los Angeles.

D: We used to play Club Lingerie there. I remember that; it was a strip club or something. We played there a few times and Texas Records, we played there. I can't remember where else. We used to do really well in Berkeley. Berkeley was great. The Berkeley Square or something, it was called, where we used to play. And then at the I Beam, where they always liked us a lot.

And anybody who's got a '57 Thunderbird convertible that they're looking to sell, send me a message (laughs). Because I'm looking to buy one.

S: San Diego is not a bad place to try to find something like that.

D: Yeah, that's right. The best one I ever saw was in San Diego. It was a kind of a coral pink one. It looked amazing. I've been thinking, I've never owned a good car. I've always owned a really old, bashed up station wagon, you know, because that's what good for carrying gear. And I thought,

maybe once in my life I should buy myself a convertible and drive around Australia. I drove across America in one...a brand new Mustang...in 1992. I rented it. Had 4 weeks off in the middle of summer. It was just the best time. Went out all through Death Valley and all over New Mexico and Arizona and a little bit of Texas and stuff. It was just stinking hot. I think the first night we were in Needles, California and it was 117 degrees at midnight. It was just fucking amazing, but I loved it. I loved the experience. Went and stayed on the Hopi reservation for quite a long time. It was good.

S: You've gotta go out there when there's snow on the ground. There's nothing like the desert with snow.

D: Yeah, everyone said don't go in the middle of summer, you're mad! But I thought, well if you're gonna experience it once, you might as well take it at its most intense. And I loved it.

Also, I discovered a lot about America that you don't discover from being in a band and just driving on the highways and playing cities endlessly. Especially New Mexico I thought was just an amazing place.

S: Yeah, this is a complicated place, and I'm sure that the perspective you get from overseas...we do a lot of fucked up things as a country, but there's a lot of people here who don't like that as well.

D: That's what I always say to people here about it...there is an anti-American thing here, but I say that Americans as individuals are some of the nicest people I've ever met. There's so many good people there. But as a government, and as a sort of economic institution, it's just so big and so powerful and unwieldy if you're not in it – if you're outside of it – well, you know what they say, America sneezes and everyone else catches pneumonia.

S: I went to Australia in 1991 just as the Gulf War broke out, and I was in Adelaide and I went and saw a rehearsal with the Spikes, who were reforming at the time. And they had a woman playing bass who when she found I was American was basically asking me "How can you do all this

stuff?", and I said, "Hey, they don't consult me about any of this".

D: That's where people get very confused about it. It's like boycotting your favorite Chinese restaurant because you don't like what's happening in Tibet. You have to educate people that it's not actually this guy's fault, you know. He didn't do it. He just happens to be one of them.

But I hope you come back soon.

Tell me: is there a better mass produced cookie than Pepperidge Farm?

S: (Somewhat flummoxed at the non-sequitur) Here in the US? I wouldn't choose most of the mass produced cookies here. People like Oreos and Chips Ahoy...the chocolate chip cookie. But that's a lower end brand than Pepperidge Farm.

D: Yeah, I remember that. That's like EL Fudge and stuff, isn't it? There's a whole bunch of the cheapy ones. But I used to go to Hawaii a lot, and hang out on the north shore. And in Foodland they had the complete range of Pepperidge Farm cookies. And there was a couple of the ones I tried that were really amazing. 'Cos we don't have a whole cookie thing happening here, you know? We have biscuits.

S: Yeah, they have those ones that are like three inches in diameter that come in a little sack. Is that the ones you're thinking of?

D: That's right, yeah. Well there was two. There's a sort of chocolate one, but they're not super sweet. They're really good. There's one shop I know in Sydney that sells a couple of kinds of Pepperidge Farms, but they're really shitty. They're not the good ones. And I always wondered if there was a better one still that was mass produced than Pepperidge Farm.

S: I don't think so. There's lots of more custom places for cookies that do much better. But Pepperidge Farm is pretty good.

D: For mass produced, they are, I thought, quite remarkable.